

# BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

## **Behavioral Interview Questions and Sample Answers**

### **1. Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.**

**What They Want to Know:** If you're being considered for a high-stress job, the interviewer will want to know how well you can work under pressure. Give a real example of how you've dealt with pressure when you respond.

Sample Answer 1: I had been working on a key project that was scheduled for delivery to the client in 60 days. My supervisor came to me and said that we needed to speed it up and be ready in 45 days, while keeping our other projects on time. I made it into a challenge for my staff, and we effectively added just a few hours to each of our schedules and got the job done in 42 days by sharing the workload. Of course, I had a great group of people to work with, but I think that my effective allocation of tasks was a major component that contributed to the success of the project.

Sample Answer 2: Pressure is very important to me. Good pressure—such as having many assignments or an upcoming deadline—helps me to stay motivated and productive. Of course, there are times when too much pressure can lead to stress. However, I'm very skilled at balancing multiple projects and meeting deadlines; this ability prevents me from feeling overly stressed. For example, I once had three large projects due in the same week, and that was a lot of pressure. However, because I created a schedule that detailed how I would break down each project into small assignments, I managed to complete all three projects ahead of time and avoided unnecessary stress.

Sample Answer 3: I try to react to situations rather than to stress. That way, I can handle the situation without becoming overly stressed. For example, when I deal with an unsatisfied customer, rather than focusing on feeling stressed, I focus on the task at hand. I believe my ability to communicate effectively with customers during these moments helps reduce my own stress. I think it also reduces any stress the customer may feel.

### **2. How do you handle a challenge? Give an example.**

**What They Want to Know:** Regardless of your job, things may go wrong and it won't always be business as usual. With this type of question, the hiring manager wants to know how you will react in a difficult situation. Focus on how you resolved a challenging situation when you respond.

Sample Answer 1: One time, my supervisor needed to leave town unexpectedly, and we were in the middle of complicated negotiations with a new sponsor. I was tasked with putting together a PowerPoint presentation just from the notes he had left, and some briefing from his manager. My presentation turned out successfully. We got the sponsorship, and the management team even recommended me for an award.

Sample Answer 2: During a difficult financial period, I was able to satisfactorily negotiate repayment schedules with multiple vendors. I developed a mutually beneficial payment plan and barter program that worked with my company's revenue flow and project schedule, and the vendor needs at the time. In addition, the agreement was easier for me to obtain because I worked very hard at developing a positive relationship with the vendor in the months that we'd been working together. From this experience, I

learned the importance of thinking outside the box while solving a problem. I also learned the importance of developing and maintaining good relationships with vendors.

Sample Answer 3: When the software development of our new product stalled, I coordinated the team that managed to get the schedule back on track. We were able to successfully troubleshoot the issues and solve the problems, within a very short period of time, and without completely burning out our team. I was able to do this by motivating the senior engineering team to brainstorm a technologically innovative solution that would solve the customer's issues with fewer development hours on our end.

Sample Answer 4: A long-term client was about to take their business to a competitor. I met with the customer and was able to change how we handled the account on a day-to-day basis, in order to keep the business. From this situation, I learned the importance of being mindful of client relations and operations, not just after issues arise, but for the duration of the relationship. As a result, other account managers have adopted my check-in and management processes, and have also seen improved results with their accounts.

### **3. Have you ever made a mistake? How did you handle it?**

**What They Want to Know:** Nobody is perfect, and we all make mistakes. The interviewer is more interested in how you handled it when you made an error, rather than in the fact that it happened. The best way to answer this question is to talk about a specific example of a time you made a mistake. Briefly explain what the mistake was, but don't dwell on it. Quickly switch over to what you learned, or how you improved, after making that mistake. You might also explain the steps you took to make sure that mistake never happened again.

It's a good idea not to mention a mistake that would be critical for success in the new position. For instance, give an example from your last position that isn't specifically related to the job requirements for the new position. It's also a good idea to mention something that is relatively minor. Avoid mentioning any mistakes that demonstrate a flaw in your character (for example, a time you got in trouble for fighting at work).

Sometimes a good mistake to mention is a team mistake. You don't want to place all the blame on your teammates, but you can say that you collectively made an error.

Sample Answer 1: I once misquoted the fees for a particular type of membership to the club where I worked. I explained my mistake to my supervisor, who appreciated my coming to him, and my honesty. He told me to offer to waive the application fee for the new member. The member joined the club despite my mistake, my supervisor was understanding, and although I felt bad that I had made a mistake, I learned to pay close attention to the details so as to be sure to give accurate information in the future.

Sample Answer 2: When I first became an assistant manager of a sales branch, I tried to take on everything myself, from the day-to-day operations of the branch to making all of the big sales calls. I quickly learned that the best managers know how to delegate effectively so that work is done efficiently. Since then, I have won numerous awards for my management skills, and I believe a lot of this has to do with my ability to delegate effectively.

Sample Answer 3: I'm the kind of person who tries to learn and grow from every mistake. Years ago, a team I was working on failed to land a sale, and we were told it had to do in part with our ineffective visuals. Over the next six months, I spent much of my free time learning how to use various software programs to

create enticing visual presentations. Since then, I've been continuously praised for my visuals in meetings and sales pitches.

Sample Answer 4: One thing I have learned from past mistakes is when to ask for help. I have learned that it is far better to ask for clarification and solve an issue right away than to be unsure. I know that your company emphasizes teamwork and the need to be in constant communication with one another, and I think my ability to ask (and answer) questions of my peers would help me fit in very well with your company culture.

Sample Answer 5: Last year, I made a terrible mistake while adding financial information to our company's bookkeeping system. It led to a shortfall in available funds at a critical time. I was actually the one who discovered my mistake first. When I did, I was able to figure out how it happened and what needed to be done about it.

With a plan in hand, I talked to my supervisor and asked that I be responsible for fixing the mistake and calling all effected parties required to remedy it, including our bank. Fortunately, this was caught soon enough that very limited impact occurred, and I was able to prove I was capable of fixing the problem myself. As a result of that mistake, I developed a method to quickly do a final review and verification of the data before publishing it, added that step to our publishing protocol, and I haven't made that mistake again.

#### **4. Give an example of how you set goals.**

**What They Want to Know:** With this question, the interviewer wants to know how well you plan and set goals for what you want to accomplish. The easiest way to respond is to share examples of successful goal setting.

Sample Answer 1: Within a few weeks of beginning my first job as a sales associate in a department store, I knew that I wanted to be in the fashion industry. I decided that I would work my way up to department manager, and at that point I would have enough money saved to be able to attend design school full-time. I did just that, and I even landed my first job through an internship I completed the summer before graduation.

#### **5. Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.**

**What They Want to Know:** The hiring manager is interested in learning what you do to achieve your goals, and the steps you take to accomplish them. What separates a good answer from an exceptional one is a description of the active strategy and steps you're taking to achieve those goals, which also speaks to your motivation and call to action.

Sample Answer 1: When I started working for XYZ Company, I wanted to achieve the Employee of the Month title. It was a motivational challenge, and not all the employees took it that seriously, but I really wanted that parking spot, and my picture on the wall. I went out of my way to be helpful to my colleagues, supervisors, and customers - which I would have done anyway. I liked the job and the people I worked with. The third month I was there, I got the honor. It was good to achieve my goal, and I actually ended up moving into a managerial position there pretty quickly, I think because of my positive attitude and perseverance.

Sample Answer 2: I plan on gaining additional skills by taking related classes and continuing my involvement with a variety of professional associations. I noticed that your company provides in-house training for employees, and I would certainly be interested in taking relevant classes.

Sample Answer 3: I will continue my professional development by participating in conferences, attending seminars, and continuing my education.

## **6. Describe a decision you made that wasn't popular, and explain how you handled implementing it.**

**What They Want to Know:** Sometimes management has to make difficult decisions, and not all employees are happy when a new policy is put in place. If you're interviewing for a decision-making role, the interviewer will want to know your process for implementing change. Essentially the interviewer is assessing your decision-making skills. When answering these questions, give one or two concrete examples of difficult situations you have actually faced at work. Then discuss what decisions you had to make to remedy the situations. You want to come across as confident and capable of making big decisions calmly and rationally.

Sample Answer 1: Once, I inherited a group of employees when their supervisor relocated to another city. They had been allowed to cover each other's shifts without management approval. I didn't like the inconsistencies, where certain people were being given more opportunities than others. I introduced a policy where I had my assistant approve all staffing changes, to make sure that everyone who wanted extra hours and was available at certain times could be utilized.

Sample Answer 2: Decisions I have to make within a team are difficult, only because these decisions take more time and require deliberate communication between team members. For example, I was working on a team project, and my colleagues and I had to make a number of choices about how to use our limited budget. Because these decisions involved group conversations, our team learned how to communicate effectively with one another, and I believe we ultimately made the best decisions for the team.

Sample Answer 3: As a manager, the most difficult decisions I make involve layoffs. Before making those tough decisions, I always think carefully about what is best for the business and my employees. While I don't relish making those kinds of choices, I don't shy away from this part of my job. A few years ago, I had to let some employees go due to the economic climate. It was a hard decision that was ultimately necessary for the good of the company and everyone working for the organization.

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## **7. Give an example of how you worked on a team.**

**What They Want to Know:** Many jobs require working as part of a team. In interviews for those roles, the hiring manager will want to know how well you work with others and cooperate with other team members. These questions provide you with the opportunity to discuss some of the characteristics that enable you to work well with your co-workers, supervisors, and clients

Sample Answer 1: During my last semester in college, I worked as part of a research team in the History department. The professor leading the project was writing a book on the development of language in Europe in the Middle Ages. We were each assigned different sectors to focus on, and I suggested that we meet independently before our weekly meeting with the professor to discuss our progress, and help each other out if we were having any difficulties. The professor really appreciated the way we worked together, and it helped to streamline his research as well. He was ready to start on his final copy months ahead of schedule because of the work we helped him with.

Sample Answer 2: “Do you prefer to work independently or on a team?” - I am equally comfortable in either situation, actually. In my last job, I had the opportunity to do both independent and team projects, and I really enjoyed the variety. My favorite work scenario is when we begin a project as a team, brainstorming our approaches and establishing our deadlines and individual responsibilities before going off to work independently on our assigned tasks. Even when working independently, however, I think it’s invaluable to be able to reach out to a team for advice and support. I also make sure that I’m available to help other project team members when they need assistance.

Sample Answer 3: “Tell me about a time you worked well as part of a team” - When I was a junior, I worked on a case project for a marketing class where six of us were asked to analyze the marketing practices of Amazon.com and make recommendations for alternative approaches. Early on we floundered in an effort to find a focus. I suggested that we look at Amazon's advertising strategy within social media. I led a discussion about the pros and cons of that topic and encouraged a couple of the more reticent members to chime in. Two of the group members didn't initially embrace my original proposal. However, I was able to draw consensus after incorporating their suggestion that we focus on targeted advertising within Facebook based on users' expressed interests. We ended up working hard as a group, receiving very positive feedback from our professor, and getting an A grade on the project.

Sample Answer 4 - “What role have you played in team situations?” - I have years of experience in team projects at my previous marketing job and that has helped me develop into a strong listener who can resolve conflict and ensure timely completion of projects. About a year ago, I was working on a team project with a tight deadline. One team member felt that his voice was not being heard, and as a result, he wasn’t working quickly enough on his element of the project. I sat down with him and listened to his concerns, and together we came up with a way for him to feel he had more input in the project. By making him feel listened to, I helped our team complete the project successfully and on time.

## **8. What do you do if you disagree with someone at work?**

**What They Want to Know:** With this question, the interviewer is seeking insight into how you handle issues at work. Focus on how you’ve solved a problem or compromised when there was a workplace disagreement. Be prepared. This type of answer always has two parts, and sometimes three. You need to describe a problem. And you need to show how you actively, not passively, resolved the situation. You don’t necessarily have to be the one who solved the entire problem, though if you did, good job for showing initiative. Many times, however, calling in the right people is the best and most appropriate form of action. Either way, don’t be shy about telling this to your interviewer.

A third part of answering this type of question involves sharing your personal philosophy. Your philosophy can be about your work ethic in general or certain industry-specific issues.

Don't stress about coming up with a major problem. Not everyone can rescue a company from financial ruin. A problem can be as simple as helping two colleagues who disagree about how to address a task resolve their differences. What you perceive as a problem and how you choose to resolve it tells a whole lot about who you are as a person.

Sample Answer 1 - A few years ago, I had a supervisor who wanted me to find ways to outsource most of the work we were doing in my department. I felt that my department was one where having the staff on premises had a huge impact on our effectiveness and ability to relate to our clients. I presented a strong case to her, and she came up with a compromise plan.

Sample Answer 2: Once I found a major flaw in the work of one of the most senior members of the department, which could have been very costly to the company if it had been overlooked. I went directly to them and called it to their attention so they could fix it before it affected the final outcome.

Sample Answer 3: I feel that the best way to deal with any challenges is to meet them head-on. When I found that one of my colleagues was saying things that weren't true behind my back, I went to them and talked it through. It turned out they had misunderstood what I had said, and I was able to set the record straight with them, and my supervisor.

Sample Answer 4: One of the major problems I have found in this profession has been a lack of proper funding for the programs we are trying to implement. I think I have a lot of creative ideas to help overcome some of the budget limitations inherent in this type of work.

## **9. Share an example of how you were able to motivate employees or co-workers.**

**What They Want to Know:** Do you have strong motivational skills? What strategies do you use to motivate your team? The hiring manager is looking for a concrete example of your ability to motivate others. This is a situational interview question with no wrong or right answer. One strategy for your response is to share an anecdote to demonstrate the motivational techniques you have used in the past.

Sample Answer 1: I was in a situation once where the management of our department was taken over by employees with experience in a totally different industry, in an effort to maximize profits over service. Many of my co-workers were resistant to the sweeping changes that were being made, but I immediately recognized some of the benefits, and was able to motivate my colleagues to give the new process a chance to succeed.

Sample Answer 2: I believe that recognizing positive aspects of employee performance is critical to motivating most workers. For example, I manage a staff of five employees, and I noticed that one of the workers was somewhat introverted and tended to stay in the background. He performed adequately but was reluctant to contribute at meetings, and I thought he could be more productive if optimally motivated. I started a daily ritual of checking in with him and monitoring his output. I provided positive feedback regarding his daily achievements. I discovered that the quality and quantity of his output increased as I interacted with him more frequently. I was able to call upon him at meetings since I understood the details of his work better and ask him to share some of his successful strategies with colleagues.

Sample Answer 3: I believe that regular and concrete feedback is important when dealing with a worker who is not performing up to her potential. I heard complaints from a few of my restaurant customers that one of my bartenders was not as cheerful and attentive as they would have liked. I started asking her

customers as they were leaving about the quality of service and informed her as soon as possible after they left about what I had learned. I let her know which behaviors were problematic and complimented her when the customer was satisfied. After a few shifts, I observed a transformation in her attitude and began to receive consistently positive feedback from her customers.

Sample Answer 4: I believe that staff members are more motivated when they understand the impact of a project and their role. I also think that they are more likely to be motivated if they have input regarding how to accomplish group or departmental goals. When I launched a fundraising campaign for a new library, I called a meeting and clearly explained the purpose of the drive and how it would benefit the college. Then I asked the group to share their insights regarding the best process for achieving our goal. After brainstorming strategies for getting the best results, I drew a consensus around a plan and designated responsibilities for each team member. The group was more invested in this campaign than in some past efforts, and we reached our goal ahead of schedule.

#### **10. Have you handled a difficult situation? How?**

**What They Want to Know:** Can you handle difficult situations at work or do you not deal with them well? The employer will want to know what you do when there's a problem.

Sample Answer 1: During a joint project, my co-worker resigned 2 weeks before the deadline. In order to finish the project on time, I consulted my manager. Between us, we decided it was best to put a minor project on hold and to prioritize this one. To make sure that the quality of the work was not affected, I worked a lot of overtime and my colleagues kindly took over some of my daily tasks to help me concentrate on getting the project finished. Although I did feel pressured, the end result was very positive. My client was more than happy with what I delivered and from this difficulty, I recognized my own capabilities and my ability to work well independently. I wouldn't have been able to do it without the help of my colleagues and my manager; I was very grateful for that."

Sample Answer 2: I have participated in several groups throughout my academic career. Recently, I had to work with a group in my statistics class, and I had some personality clashes with one of the group members. However, I realized the importance of completing the assignment in a prompt and efficient manner. I made it a point to put my differences aside and complete my part, along with offering assistance to the other group members. As a result, we finished our assignment without any conflict.

Sample Answer 3: On Project XYZ at Company 123, I was unexpectedly thrust into a team lead role and had two team members who hated working with each other. So, I designed a project planning meeting that would get the three of us talking about best ways to approach the project and leverage each of their strengths. The results were excellent as we delivered the project on time and on budget.

Sample Answer 4: I was once tasked with leading a project that was entirely outside of the realm of my position description that involved preparing a 7-piece mailing in-house for 500 individuals. I was given guidance on how to prepare the 7 components which included collaborating with individuals from a different team. My first step was to create a timeline and a list of action items to ensure that I didn't miss a step that could derail the project. I contacted all parties involved and informed them of the timeline and their tasks. I added a decent amount of buffer time in my deadlines to allow for error since this was an unfamiliar project for me. Once I had that ball rolling, I booked a conference room for an afternoon to allow me the time and space to fully prepare this mailing in-house. Then, I contacted the volunteer coordinator to recruit some support for physically putting the mailing together. I maintained regular contact and checked-

in with everyone involved to ensure a smooth process. As a result of my planning, communication, and accountability, I was able to complete the project a full 4 days ahead of schedule with no errors."

### **11. What have been your most positive and negative management experiences?**

**What They Want to Know:** Employers might ask you this question to understand what you like and dislike in certain management styles. This might help them decide whether or not you would be a good fit under a certain manager. You should answer this question honestly and as tactfully as possible.

Sample Answer 1: One of my past managers, while very talented, tended to manage our team's work closely with little flexibility on how things were to be done. It made me feel like I wasn't trusted and there wasn't much room for process improvement. My most recent manager was terrific at listening to my needs and helping me get the resources I needed to achieve my goals. I thrive under managers who create a collaborative, trusting team environment.

Sample Answer 2: My ideal boss would encourage clear communication between herself and her employees. I believe that communication—in person, as well as via phone and email—is critical to a successful relationship between an employer and employee.

Sample Answer 3: I've worked under employers with a variety of management styles. I've had some employers who encourage lots of independent work, and others who prefer to give clear, specific instructions. I thrive in both environments. I work very well independently, but also know when to ask questions.

Sample Answer 4: Early in my career, I had a manager who enabled me to take on more responsibility as I progressed in my job. That manager helped me a great deal, and we still stay in touch. I've honestly learned something from each boss I've had.

### **12. What's your biggest weakness?**

**What They Want to Know:** Employers may ask about your weaknesses to see if you have a sense of self-awareness and how you're working to improve.

Sample Answer 1: One weakness I've been working on is my ability to provide constructive criticism. I understand how providing feedback on work or projects that could have been handled better is extremely valuable. To improve on this, I'm writing down my feedback before I approach my colleagues. This helps me to plan out my answer, give the best criticism possible and be less nervous.

### **13. Tell me about a time you had to complete a task within a tight deadline. Describe the situation, and explain how you handled it.**

**What They Want to Know:** Employers ask this type of question to see how you handle time pressure.

Sample Answer 1: While I typically like to plan out my work in stages and complete it piece by piece, I can also achieve high-quality work results under tight deadlines. Once, at a former company, an employee left days before the imminent deadline of one of his projects. I was asked to assume responsibility for it, with only a few days to learn about and complete the project. I created a task force and delegated work, and we



all completed the assignment with a day to spare. In fact, I believe I thrive when working under tight deadlines.

#### **14. What do you do when a team member refuses to complete his or her quota of the work?**

**What They Want to Know:** Employers ask this type of question to see how you handle conflicts with coworkers.

Sample Answer 1: When there are team conflicts or issues, I always try my best to step up as team leader if needed. I think my communication skills make me an effective leader and moderator. For example, one time, when I was working on a team project, two of the team members got embroiled in an argument, both refusing to complete their assignments. They were both dissatisfied with their workloads, so I arranged a team meeting where we reallocated all the assignments among the team members. This made everyone happier and more productive, and our project was a success.

#### **15. Tell me about a time you showed initiative on the job.**

**What They Want to Know:** Employers ask this type of question to see how whether you just do the minimum to complete your job or whether you have the drive and vision to improve the process.

Sample Answer 1: Last winter, I was acting as an account coordinator, supporting the account executive for a major client at an ad agency. The account executive had an accident and was sidelined three weeks before a major campaign pitch.

I volunteered to fill in and orchestrate the presentation by coordinating the input of the creative and media teams. I called an emergency meeting and facilitated a discussion about ad scenarios, media plans, and the roles of various team members in relation to the presentation.

I was able to achieve a consensus on two priority ad concepts that we had to pitch, along with related media strategies. I drew up a minute-by-minute plan of how we would present the pitch that was warmly received by the team based on our discussions. The client loved our plan and adopted the campaign. I was promoted to account executive six months later.

#### **16. What are your salary requirements?**

**What They Want to Know:** This is a question in which you should never enter blindly. You should do pre-interview research on sites like Glassdoor and PayScale to find out what others in similar positions are being paid. Once you do this, you will have a salary range in your back pocket so you're prepared to name a salary that's acceptable for the position coupled with your skills, experience and education.

Based on your research and the salary range you've researched; it's recommended that you name the high end of the salary range you came up with. However, make sure the interviewer knows you are flexible with your number. This communicates that you feel your skills are valuable but you absolutely want the position and are open to negotiations.

Remember to narrow your research to your region. Salaries for a job in Austin, Texas, may be different from those in New York City.

Sample Answer 1: My salary range is flexible. I would, of course, like to be compensated fairly for my decade of experience and award-winning sales record. However, I'm open to discussing specific numbers once we've discussed the details of the position.

Sample Answer 2: My salary requirements are flexible, but I do have significant experience in the field that I believe adds value to my candidacy. I look forward to discussing in more detail what my responsibilities at this company would be. From there, we can determine a fair salary for the position.

Sample Answer 3: I'd like to learn more about the specific duties required of this position, which I look forward to in this interview. However, I do understand that positions similar to this one pay in the range of \$X to \$Z in our region. With my experience, skills, and certifications, I would expect to receive something in the range of \$Y to \$Z.

Sample Answer 4: I'm open to discussing what you believe to be a fair salary for the position. However, based on my previous salary, my knowledge of the industry, and my understanding of this geographic area, I'd expect a salary in the general range of \$X to \$Y. Again, I'm open to discussing these numbers with you.

## **17. How Would Your Colleagues Describe You?**

**What They Want to Know:** This isn't a chance for you to give an egotistical answer and blow your own trumpet. Pick qualities that would be admirable in the workplace and use examples from your previous job.

Sample Answer 1: I think my coworkers would describe me as punctual, hard-working and trustworthy. Punctual because I was always a few minutes early for meetings. Hard-working; because I never missed a deadline and ensured I never left the office until the assignment was finished. Trustworthy because my boss entrusted me to conduct employee reviews and host my own meetings that were all kept confidential.

## Strange/Weird Interview Questions

### How to Answer a Weird Interview Question

If you are asked an interview question that seems bizarre, don't panic. Below is a list of tips on how to handle a weird interview question. Bizarre interview questions are often meant to take you out of your comfort zone because that's where a hiring manager can better see your strengths and weaknesses. You can prepare for some of these types of questions, but you will likely face new ones with a different twist. Remember that you can ask questions for clarification before answering an interviewer. For example, for the question about designing a TV remote control, you might ask for details about the intended user. Or, for the traffic light question, you could inquire if the situation is a life-threatening emergency or something less serious, like a meeting with friends. In all cases, consider these interview questions a chance to show a more complete version of yourself than what a hiring manager sees on your CV.

- **Prepare.** The best way to prepare for any interview question is to practice. Practice answering common interview questions with a friend; this will help give you confidence during the interview. Ask a friend to ask you a couple of tough interview questions during your practice as well. Also, take a look at some questions that might be trickier than they seem at first glance.
- **Stay Calm.** If you are asked a question that stumps you, first take a deep breath. Maintain good posture, and look the interviewer in the eye. You want to appear calm and confident, even if you don't feel that way.
- **Think first** – why are they asking this question? Does it relate to ingenuity, creativity, conflict, imagination? Here's what lies at the root of these questions: **Interviewers ask them to understand how you think.** Watching you struggle to formulate an answer to a question that doesn't have a right or wrong answer can reveal a lot about you. The good news is, if they're asking weird questions, they've probably determined that you have the skills to do the job; now they want to see how you think about a problem before you answer.
- **Buy Some Time.** If you draw a blank, know that it is ok to take a little pause before answering. You can also buy some time with a comment such as, "that is a very interesting question; let me think about that for a moment."
- **Ask Questions.** Most odd interview questions are intended to assess your critical thinking skills. Quite often, there is no "right" answer. Explaining your reasoning out loud as you respond to the question will demonstrate your thought process, even if you struggle to arrive at the answer. If you are at all confused, ask clarifying questions.
- **Think About the Job.** Remember that interview questions are designed to determine whether or not you have the skills required for the job. As you answer a question, think about answering in such a way that demonstrates a skill or quality you have that qualifies you for the job. For example, if the interviewer asks what color best represents you, you might say, "blue, because it is a calming color, and I am good at staying calm under pressure."
- **Come Back to it Later.** If your mind is still blank, consider saying something like, "That is a very interesting question. May I take some time to consider it and get back to you later?" Hopefully, after a little time, you will be able to answer the question.
- **Follow-Up.** If you could not answer the question by the end of the interview, include a response to the question in your thank you letter.

## Types of Strange/Weird Questions

### 1. Tricky Technical Questions

For jobs that require strong analytical thinking, interviewers sometimes throw out an interview question that requires quick calculations or logical reasoning. For example:

- *Why are manhole covers round?*
- *How many golf balls can you fit in an Airbus 380?*
- *There are 25 racehorses, no stopwatch and 5 racetracks. How would you figure out the top three fastest horses in the fewest number of races?*
- *How can you drop a raw egg on a very hard floor without breaking it?*

By asking such things, hiring managers want to learn more about your thought process, how you identify and frame problems – in short, they want to know if you are “one of them.” Additionally, they want to see how you react to a question you can’t answer.

Your strategy should be to stay cool and take a minute to collect your thoughts. Then, unless you know the correct answer, discuss how you’d go about figuring it out if you had the resources and more time. Also, pay close attention to the words used in the questions – on occasion, the answer is already there. Hint: you can’t break a hard floor with a raw egg!

### 2. Culture Questions

Posing questions about trending events or the lifestyle scene allows hiring managers to determine if you will match the corporate culture. It’s a way to find out if you have a sense of humor (and what kind), your interests outside work, and perhaps if you are more introverted or extroverted:

- *What’s your favorite Bill Murray movie?*
- *What’s your take on this year’s spring fashion trends?*
- *Which 90’s song would you most like to hear performed live?*
- *Where do you spend most of your “online” time?*

Again, you might not be able to answer these types of queries directly, but you can use them as a springboard to discuss broader interests. For instance, if you don’t have a clue about spring fashion, admit it, and then mention that you like the overall trend of business casual dress at work.

### 3. Values Questions

Hypothetical questions about your behavior in challenging scenarios shed light on your judgment, and your EQ (emotional quotient, or your level of self-awareness, empathy and social skills) and your cost-benefit analysis skills.

- *If you were in a real hurry but stopping at a red light ahead would make you late, would you drive through the light?*
- *If you found out that your best friend’s husband was cheating on her, what would you do?*
- *If you had to choose between completing your work correctly and completing it on time which would you choose?*

You may not wish to discuss your own experience in one of these situations –especially if it is uncomfortably personal – but you may instead segue into a discussion of how you would assess the

situation, weigh the options, and make the best decision you can with the information you have at the time.

#### 4. Original Thought Questions

Think about your responses to these:

- *If you were a fruit, which one would you be?*
- *What title would you give your autobiography?*
- *Tell me a joke.*
- *What's your favorite restaurant?*

Such interview queries test how well you understand yourself and can convey it. They are designed to force you to go off-script and think originally.

Relax! There are usually no “right” or “wrong” answers here, but you still want to make sure to respond in a way that puts you in a positive light professionally. See these questions as an opportunity to describe your interests and personality in more detail. For example, if you want to highlight that you enjoy working in teams but value individualism too, tell the hiring manager you'd be a grape – a fruit that can stand alone but prefers hanging in bunches. Can't think of a (clean) joke? Describe a sign or advertisement you've seen recently that really made you laugh.

#### 5. Creativity Questions

If your prospective job requires creative thinking, you can expect bizarre interview questions that ask you to come up with innovative ideas on the spot. How about one of the following:

- *Can you explain a database in three sentences to an eight-year-old?*
- *How would you describe the color “yellow” to a blind person?*
- *How would you design a simpler TV remote control?*

Good innovation starts with customer empathy – that is, viewing the situation from the user's perspective. So, the best way to approach a creativity question is to start with a context the user can understand. For instance, a blind person may have never seen the color yellow, but she will know the feeling of sunlight and warmth, two concepts you could use to describe it.

#### Sample Strange/Weird Questions

- How lucky are you and why?
- If you were a pizza delivery man, how would you benefit from scissors?
- If you could sing one song on American Idol, what would it be?
- Are you more of a hunter or a gatherer?
- If you were on an island and could only bring three things, what would you bring?
- If you were a box of cereal, what would you be and why?
- Do you believe in Bigfoot?
- Why is a tennis ball fuzzy?
- What is your least favorite thing about humanity?
- How would you use Yelp to find the number of businesses in the U.S.?
- How honest are you?

- How many square feet of pizza are eaten in the U.S. each year?
- If you were 80 years old, what would you tell your children?
- You're a new addition to the crayon box, what color would you be and why?
- How does the internet work?
- If there was a movie produced about your life, who would play you and why?
- What's the color of money?
- What was the last gift you gave someone?
- What is the funniest thing that has happened to you recently?
- How many snow shovels sold in the U.S. last year?
- It's Thursday, we're staffing you on a telecommunications project in Calgary, Canada on Monday. Your flight and hotel are booked; your visa is ready. What are the top five things you do before you leave?
- Describe to me the process and benefits of wearing a seat belt.
- Have you ever been on a boat?
- We finish the interview and you step outside the office and find a lottery ticket that ends up winning \$10 million. What would you do?
- What do you think about when you're alone in your car?
- If you could be any animal in the world, what animal would you be and why?
- What were you like in high school?
- What's the last thing you watched on TV and why did you choose to watch it?
- Any advice for your previous boss?
- Tell me something about your last job, other than money, that would have inspired you to keep working there.
- Pretend you're our CEO. What three concerns about the firm's future keep you up at night?
- If I were to hire you for this job and I granted you three promises with regard to working here, what would they be?
- What inspires you?
- Teach me something I don't know in the next five minutes.
- What's the most interesting thing about you that we wouldn't learn from your resume alone?
- If you woke up and had 2,000 unread emails and could only answer 300 of them, how would you choose which ones to answer?
- How many pennies would fit into this room?
- Describe the color yellow to somebody who is blind.
- If you were to get rid of one state in the U.S., which would it be and why?
- You've been given an elephant. You can't give it away or sell it. What would you do with the elephant?
- Who would win a fight between Spiderman and Batman?
- A penguin walks through that door right now wearing a sombrero. What does he say and why is he here?
- When you arrive at work, you find that someone has bubble-wrapped your entire office/desk and everything in it. What do you do?